

Ex-reporter's scrutiny of

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SHOOKSTOWN, Md. — As the 18th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's assassination passes this weekend, Harold Weisberg's personal autopsy of the government's investigation continues.

Three of his groundbreaking lawsuits against the Justice Department — using the Freedom of Information Act to pry loose investigative evidence that remains stowed away — still await action in federal court in Washington, according to his lawyer.

Weisberg's basement-full of photostats and other documents, about 80 file cabinets which he calls the "largest private archive" on the shooting, are pored over by students these days. They're cataloging the files to be turned over to a university in Wisconsin.

The 68-year-old former reporter and intelligence officer started his personal probe shortly after the Dallas killing, and six books later he explained why he continues:

"We may never find out who killed the president or conspired to kill the president, but we may make the system work," Weisberg said.

His years of badgering the government, his eight or nine original lawsuits that have multiplied in appeals, he chalks up to "individual citizen self-government."

A visitor in Weisberg's rural home in the western Maryland foothills, Harrison Livingstone, had lectured in Baltimore only days before on his own assassination research concerning bullet wound evidence.

"I've spent the last 2½ years working on one evidentiary point," Livingstone said.

He said he is working on a book that will show there was a conspiracy of politically powerful and

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wealthy individuals whom he mysteriously dubs "the war party" behind the assassination.

Weisberg interrupted. "I'm not a conspiracy theorist," he said. "I don't know. I don't think anyone knows because the assassination was not investigated."

The two men, who do not collaborate, said the many Kennedy assassination researchers across the country do not get together to compare notes. "I think most of the people are well-intentioned," Weisberg said. "But I think most of them are wrong."

Once, in 1978, a federal judge

ordered the FBI to hand over to Weisberg 40,000 pages of documents pertaining to the Kennedy killing.

The reports he has recovered from closed files punctuate Weisberg's books, making them read like legal briefs against the official investigation.

In his cozy living room, where one wall is decorated with a framed facsimile of President Richard Nixon's resignation letter and a bookcase is topped with a small bust of Kennedy, Weisberg said he has applied the analytical techniques he picked up as a reporter for Wilmington, Del., newspapers and later as a State Department intelligence officer.

One document he's seeking through his federal suits — a transcript of a closed discussion by Warren Commission members — he discovered while combing an inventory that another suit produced.

"I found out they had a stenotype," he said with a grin.

He's also seeking certain FBI field office documents and reports of spectrographic tests on the bullets fired at Kennedy. The spectrographic process, burning a specimen and analyzing the spectrum of light it creates, Weisberg said, "is so precise that they can identify different batches [of bullets] from the same manufacturer."

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Kennedy-death probe goes on

Evidence from that test and one using "neutron activation analysis" could ultimately establish that there was another gun besides that allegedly used by Lee Harvey Oswald, the "lone assassin" of the Warren Report.

In the course of his lawsuits, Weisberg has taken depositions

from FBI agents and from some of the motorcycle policemen who flanked Kennedy's Lincoln on the Dallas motorcade and who, he said, were overlooked in the original probes.

The retired Weisberg justifies what has become a life's avocation in simpler terms.

"I want nothing like this ever to happen again," he said. "We can't prevent an assassination. But we can prevent all of the evil consequences of a sloppy investigation."

He corrected himself, rapping on a reprinted investigation document. "This is not just sloppiness... This is a monstrous fraud."